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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001068

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DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: RCTV PROTESTS CONTINUE, BRV CONTINUES PRESSURE

REF: A. CARACAS 01055
[1](#)B. CARACAS 01054
[1](#)C. CARACAS 01016
[1](#)D. CARACAS 01014

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On May 31, students and other opposition groups continued protests over the closure of RCTV. Chavez supporters have sought to intimidate and attack marchers, and at least one student may have died as a result of clashes. National Assembly Deputy and Chavista march organizer Dario Vivas announced a number of upcoming pro-BRV rallies, including a "megamarch" June 2. The Attorney General's office summoned Globovision president Alberto Federico Ravell and anchor Leopoldo Castillo to answer questions regarding an allegation that the station and CNN showed footage advocating Chavez' assassination. Popular Power Minister for Interior and Justice Pedro Carreno invited student leaders to an afternoon meeting May 31 to "coordinate security" for future marches. Zulia Governor and opposition leader Manuel Rosales called on Chavez to hold a consultative referendum on RCTV's fate. More opposition and student marches are scheduled for June 1. End Summary.

Day Six: Two Deaths

[1](#)2. (SBU) Scattered, generally small, but enthusiastic student protests continued for the sixth straight day in Caracas and several other Venezuelan cities. There are reports that a pro-RCTV student in Carabobo State was killed, but we do not have good information on the circumstances. Separately, an Andres Bello University student was killed in Caracas on May 31. Minister Carreno quickly announced that her death may have been a criminal act and not related to the protests. BRV officials claim they have already caught the culprits.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Carreno invited student protest leaders to a meeting the afternoon of May 31, he said, to coordinate security for future marches. We have heard no official word as to whether the students will meet with Carreno. Student leaders held a press conference and coordination meeting at a Caracas university instead.

Rosales Reacts

14. (SBU) Zulia Governor and opposition leader Manuel Rosales gave a May 30 press conference and called on the BRV to hold a referendum on RCTV's future. He criticized President Chavez for his threat to call his followers in the streets and BRV intimidation of marchers. He also demanded the release of the more than 200 protesters that were detained May 29. He denounced Chavez' threat to close Globovision, saying that if he followed through, the Venezuelan leader might as well "throw the constitution into (Caracas') Guaire river." In response to reporters' questions, Rosales said criticism is needed from more regional leftist parties, but noted that many of them have been fooled by Chavista propaganda. Rosales' international relations adviser, Timoteo Zambrano, added that internal differences over how to view Venezuela have prevented many leftist parties from speaking out. However, he noted that some prominent leftist, such as Spain's Felipe Gonzalez and Chile's Ricardo Lagos, and many center-right parties have criticized the RCTV decision.

Chavistas Ramp Up

15. (SBU) The BRV and its supporters are beginning to respond to Chavez' May 29 call to "defend the revolution." National Assembly deputy Dario Vivas announced a pro-BRV "megamarch" for June 2 and set an out-sized goal of two million participants. Vivas said they will also organize "popular assemblies" throughout Caracas and instruct community councils to form "information networks" in their areas. Bolivarian university students and youth members of the Francisco Miranda Front held small pro-BRV rallies in Caracas' Plaza Venezuela, Sabana Grande, and Las Tres Gracias Plaza May 31 without incident. A group of pro-Chavez students at the Central University of Venezuela staged a

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rally on campus calling for peace, debate, and compromise. Separately, pro-Chavez supporters are trying to intimidate pro-RCTV protesters. A clash in Aragua state on May 30 between BRV and RCTV supporters resulted in four injuries and six arrests. There are also rumors that security forces and Chavez supporters are trying to infiltrate student protests in hopes of provoking clashes.

16. (SBU) Minister Carreno held a brief press conference May 31, perhaps in response to human rights' NGOs criticism of police treatment of demonstrators. He said that only those caught committing violent acts had been arrested, not those protesting peacefully. He also warned that protesters need permission to demonstrate or they could be considered to be operating "outside of the law." He claimed faculty at the private universities were encouraging the protests, suggesting they are upset about Chavez' recent announcement that the BRV would open 24 new universities, jeopardizing the existing universities' revenue.

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Judiciary acts against Opposition Personalities
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17. (U) The Attorney General summoned Globovision president Alberto Federico Ravell and popular talk show host Leopoldo Castillo to answer questions on June 6 and 7, respectively, in response to Minister of Popular Power for Communications William Lara's claims that Globovision was subliminally encouraging Chavez' assassination. The charges stem from the pre-shutdown broadcast of a video clip featuring the salsa hit, "This is not over yet," with images of the 1981 assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II. Lara suggested this juxtaposition amounted to an incitement to assassinate Chavez, and called for an investigation. Also, the night of May 30, a team of 40 Metropolitan Police temporarily detained opposition march leader Oscar Perez for illegal use of an

official vehicle. Perez, a Miranda State legislator who has immunity from arrest, claimed he was blindfolded and beaten at the time of his arrest. Meanwhile, most of the protesters arrested in connection with the May 29 demonstrations have reportedly been released pending trial.

Comment

18. (C) University students are reportedly planning a large demonstration June 1. The march will be an important test of their staying power. The two students' deaths, if found to be connected to ongoing events, and further arrests or deaths could re-energize the protests, which had appeared to be diminishing in strength (at least in Caracas). Meanwhile, Chavez continues to rely on his traditional tools of official intimidation through the judicial system and his supporters' bullying. The government-sponsored march on June 2 will be more a test of the BRV's well-funded political machinery than of its popular support.

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